



FAQs: Use of Force, Police Accountability, Officer Training and Community Outreach

The recent deaths of George Floyd and others at the hands of police officers have put focus on how police departments use force, how officers are held accountable, how they are trained, and what steps can be taken to make policing better for everyone in the community. We hear you. We are dedicated – and bound by policy, law and humanity – to treat every person equally and with respect. In our ongoing commitment to transparency, please find answers below to some of our most commonly asked questions:

Use of Force

Does your department allow officers to use chokehold techniques?

NO, chokeholds are NOT permitted. Intentional strikes or pressure to the throat with the hands, feet, legs, elbows, knees, or any implement are strictly prohibited.

Does your department require officers to intervene and stop excessive force used by other officers and report these incidents immediately to a supervisor?

Yes. A member has the duty to intervene to prevent or stop another member's use of force if he or she knows or reasonably believes the use of force to be excessive, and to report this action to his or her supervisor. Failure to do so is a direct policy violation.

Does your department train and require de-escalation techniques?

Yes, de-escalation is taught in the recruit academy and in annual trainings for ALL officers. The goal is to verbally diffuse situations before there is ever a need to engage in physical contact or force.

How do officers determine the appropriate use of force in any situation?

Officers are permitted only to use the minimal level of force that is necessary to effect lawful purposes – no more, and for no other reason. Officers are required to constantly evaluate the situation to determine what, if any, level of force is needed and to stop immediately when the threat is over. This is taught in a Use of Force Continuum in the academy.

EVERY use-of-force is reviewed by multiple supervisors and commanders to ensure force was not misused or excessive. Uses of force that result in death or serious injury are turned over to the criminal investigations bureau and reviewed by the state's attorney from an outside jurisdiction to ensure impartiality.

Does your department require exhausting all alternatives before using force, particularly deadly force?

Yes, officers are trained and expected to use verbal techniques first, and then if necessary, the minimal amount of force needed to maintain safety and only in direct response to the actions of another. Officers are taught to only use or escalate force as absolutely necessary to ensure safety, not to inflict harm, and stop IMMEDIATELY when the threat is over.

Deadly force may ONLY be used when an officer's life or the lives of others are in imminent danger. In 2019, officers discharged their firearms ZERO times in any use-of-force situation.

Does your department require a warning before using a firearm?

Yes, officers are required to give a verbal warning prior to the use of deadly force except in articulable exigent circumstances, such as being fired upon. A verbal warning also is required before an officer deploys a TASER.

Does your department ban shooting at moving vehicles?

The discharge of firearms at or from motor vehicles, either stopped or in motion, is strictly prohibited unless necessary to protect the officer's life or the life of another.

Accountability and Transparency

Is your department held to national and local standards?

The Howard County Police Department is one of only *six percent* of agencies in the U.S. accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) and was most recently re-accredited in 2018. The department met or exceeded nearly 400 standards and received an advanced meritorious accreditation.

All officers are certified by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission (MPTSC). Every year since 2005, Howard County police academy leaders were named MPTSC Instructors of the Year.

Who investigates complaints from residents or other officers?

All complaints, including allegations of bias and inappropriate levels of force, are reviewed by the Internal Affairs Division (IAD), which reports directly to the Chief of Police.

What happens to an officer if he or she uses deadly force?

When an officer's actions result in death or serious physical injury, he or she is placed into an administrative assignment pending the outcome of the investigation. The Criminal Investigations Bureau investigates the incident and the findings are sent to an outside state's attorney's office, for an independent determination if criminal charges against the officer are appropriate. The case is also reviewed by IAD to determine if the officer followed all required policies.

How do I file a complaint against an officer?

Complaints against officers may be filed in-person, over the phone, or by filling out a form. More information about the IAD process and filing a complaint is available here:

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Police/MM-Contact-Us>

How often are complaints filed against officers?

In 2019, the department handled a total of 13 complaints against officers from residents for the entire year. An additional 16 complaints were investigated from reports by other officers or supervisors. (Most investigations come from internal sources, as the HCPD expects officers to hold each other accountable and to the highest standards.) Of those complaints, one was an allegation of misuse of force, which was determined to be not sustained, and one was an allegation of bias-based policing, which is still being investigated. Full 2019 complaint statistics are always available to the public and can be found in the Annual Report: bit.ly/HCPD2019REPORT

How does your department take proactive steps to identify race-based issues?

The HCPD works with the Office of Human Rights and the Human Rights Commission to address any concerns that may arise. Additionally, IAD takes proactive steps to ensure impartial enforcement, including reviewing traffic stop data; practices, and training; and citizen concerns.

Does your department have a program to identify "problem" officers?

Yes, IAD uses an Early Identification System (EIS) to reveal employee conduct or performance patterns. EIS tracks significant events such as complaints against officers and use-of-force incidents. The EIS software will prompt alerts if an officer has two or more Internal Affairs complaints within a six-month period, or three or more use-of-force incidents within a six-month period. If an alert is received, IAD initiates a process to evaluate the information and take necessary action, even if an outside complaint was never filed.

Does your department have body worn cameras (BWC)?

The department conducted a body camera pilot program in 2017, upon a recommendation from a BWC committee. After the pilot, the committee, comprised of many representatives from inside and outside the agency, ultimately found barriers that would need to be resolved before the program could move forward, including budget, staffing, and adequate space issues. Those findings were presented

to the county executive's office and there is currently not a body worn camera program in Howard County.

Where can I find copies of your policies and procedures?

In the interest of transparency to the community our department policy on Use of Force and other procedures can be found on our website www.hcpd.org.

Education and Training

How much training do new officers receive?

All entry-level officers must complete a six-month police academy and must meet the standards of the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission (MPTSC) to graduate from the academy. Upon graduation, probationary officers must complete a 14-week field training and evaluation program. The probationary officer is trained in the field by at least three field training officers. HCPD exceeds the minimum training standards set forth by MPTSC, which requires a minimum of 750 hours for an entry level academy; HCPD's academy is 1120 hours. The MPTSC mandates a minimum of 240 hours of Field Training, but the HCPD's FTO program is 560 hours.

Are officers trained in implicit bias, impartial policing, and de-escalation?

YES, all officers are trained in the academy and throughout their careers in bias-based policing, impartial enforcement, and de-escalation. They also are trained in cultural awareness; LGBTQ+ awareness; helping individuals with developmental disorders; autism awareness; communicating with the deaf and hard of hearing; and mental health awareness.

Each academy class conducts "Lunch and Learn" sessions with members of the LGBTQ+, African American, Korean, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Hispanic, Indian, and Muslim communities. Guests come to the academy for lunch and sharing personal experiences, challenges and issues each of the communities face when interacting with law enforcement. The atmosphere provides an opportunity to have very open and personal conversations between the recruits and members of the community.

How are officers trained to use physical force?

The HCPD defensive tactics program emphasizes using the least amount of force necessary to control a situation. Officers must complete an annual course on defensive tactics, which includes rendering immediate aid to a person involved in a use-of-force incident.

How are officers trained to help people with mental health issues or those who are in crisis?

Officers receive mental health and crisis training in the academy and throughout their careers that is focused on active listening and de-escalation. Additionally, the department provides officers Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) certification, 40 hours of intensive specialized training in interacting with people with mental health issues.

The department also has a state-licensed mental health professional on staff, a full-time mental health liaison officer, and a Mobile Crisis Team (MCT) of trained mental health professionals who assist police officers with people in crisis.

The department also offers a voluntary 9-1-1 flagging program for residents with developmental, intellectual, degenerative or physical disorders or disability who have wandered off, gone missing, or are in a state of crisis. Families can register for the 9-1-1 flagging program so police can be alerted immediately that their loved one has a certain condition, which provides responding officers with valuable information and ways to help before they even arrive. Learn more here:

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Police/Programs-and-Services>

Community Outreach and Involvement

In what ways does the department focus on community policing?

Community policing is engrained in our department. Every officer is trained and encouraged to work with the people they serve and form relationships with those on their beat. These values are consistent with the recommendations made by the nation's 21st Century Policing Task Force Report in 2015: https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf

The department also has a full-time Community Outreach Division staffed with many officers whose primary purpose is to foster communication, transparency and relationships with the community. They work with residents, business owners, faith-based organizations, and others to solve quality-of-life issues. They also use a statistics-based approach to allocate resources to the areas that need the most attention.

Additionally, the department works closely with a number of diverse community organizations to ensure the needs of all Howard County residents are met. The Community Outreach Division serves as point of contact for those of different cultures, abilities, and the LGBTQ+ community to help address specific concerns.

How can I get involved?

Citizens Advisory Council: The Citizens Advisory Council consists of active community leaders who volunteer their time and energy to address law enforcement services in Howard County. Meetings are held with the Chief of Police on a monthly basis and provide a forum for citizens to provide input on police services. You can apply to be a member of the CAC by filling out an application: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Police/Citizens-Advisory-Council-Form>

Citizens Police Academy: The department offers Howard County residents the opportunity to participate in the Citizens Police Academy, a free, interactive, 12-week course that offers an inside look into the department's day-to-day operations and provides an understanding of the kind of training police officers receive in Howard County. The Citizens Police Academy is run once a year.

Police Foundation: The Howard County Police Foundation is a nonprofit organization supported by local businesses that aids the police department in funding and promoting efforts to improve public safety, youth programs and quality of life in the community. By teaming business leaders with law enforcement, the Foundation can address common concerns and establish goals to ensure the needs of the department and community are being met. Visit www.HCPF.org for more information.